

She had to overcome on the deportation of her parents and with the help of foster homes goes to college



In the midst of an internal battle, Rebecca León was forging strength and decided that despite the adversities she would draw strength from her weakness and find a way to university. (Courtesy / DCFS)

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On the way to higher education, Rebecca León had to overcome a whirlwind of changes that included the deportation of her parents and a constant displacement of housing until she entered foster care, where she found stability and support to go in search of her objectives.

"I'm excited," acknowledged the 18-year-old, who in a few days is going to move to Brandeis University in the state of Massachusetts, where she will study Neuroscience and Environmental Studies, after graduating from high school in a Los Angeles school, where she arrived in 2017.

Leon was born in Salt Lake, in the state of Utah. Without her planning, she had to live indifferent places, partly due to poverty and the immigration status of her parents. "Since I was little my family has moved around a lot," she admitted.



Rebecca León graduated June 13 from high school in Los Angeles, the city she arrived in in 2017, after her parents were deported. (Courtesy / DCFS)

The harshest turnaround occurred when she was 7 years old. Her parents were deported to Mexico and both León and her two older brothers went to live in the state of Baja California.

At first Rebecca felt in a strange place and it was like a culture shock, something that happened when she was barely entering elementary school. With the passage of time, she was able to adapt, but her vision was not to live in Mexico and she returned to the United States following her older brother.

"I had to sacrifice my parents," confessed the young woman, detailing that by then she was 11 years old.

Constant mobility became an emotional instability and, at the same time, living without the shelter of her parents, she had to fight against loneliness.

In the midst of that internal battle, she forged strength and decided that despite the adversities she would turn her weakness into strength and find a way to go to university.

"I didn't want that to be the same in high school," she said, referring to the changes she was constantly subjected with different family members.

"I will be the first to go to school in my family, I had to learn alone," she revealed. As she was about to enter tenth grade, she moved to Los Angeles with another family member. After a year, her hosts experienced housing problems and again went into limbo.

"It was very difficult, my goal was to finish my school in Los Angeles and not move," she said.

"Yes, it was something that affected me a lot, it is a loneliness that you feel, it is like abandonment," added Leon, detailing that she was convinced that she would continue in southern California anyway.

At that time, she went to a school counselor and was referred to foster homes that are managed by the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS).

Until the end of May, in DCFS they had just over 18 thousand minors in foster homes, more than 50% with a relative or acquaintance.

"I had no other choice," said León, indicating that her foster mother was the counselor she had at school, a woman of Jewish origin.

"I was definitely able to be in a stable place until I finished my [last] school year in high school, I was able to get more help, more resources," she added.



Rebecca León, 18, was accepted at Brandeis University, in the state of Massachusetts, where she will study Neuroscience and Environmental Studies. (Courtesy / DCFS)

Currently, the DCFS serves some 36,227 boys and girls, 57.9% of whom are of Latino origin, who have entered the system for different reasons, some for abuse and others for neglect in the home.

Of the youth in foster care, 359 graduated from high school in June, including Leon, who one day after the virtual ceremony left for Utah and will leave for Massachusetts in early August.

"My goal was always to graduate from high school, it was already in progress; and entering the system [of foster care] helped me much more," she assured with gratitude.

In León's opinion, this system can be of great support for children and adolescents who are going through a situation similar to the one she experienced.

"There has to be no fear of asking for help," she exhorted.

In the short term, this young woman sees herself as a neurosurgeon and her idea is to contribute to society in the midst of so much need in the field of health.

"I have always liked traveling," she said, something she learned when moving from home throughout her life; However, now with the scholarship that she was awarded, she will move with an eye toward the crowning achievement of a university career. "I am excited, [I want] to know and see how it goes," she concluded.